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The Possibility of an Interdisciplinary Poetic Pedagogy: Re-Conceiving Knowing and Being

Debb Hurlock

Abstract:

This paper grew out of the unique and mysterious discovery of the prolific use of Canadian writer, Bronwen Wallace's poetry, by students and teachers in nursing. Before the *actual* interpretation of the kinship of poetry and nursing, it is important to first consider a reconceived understanding of the interconnected relationship of epistemology and ontology that can be found within hermeneutic inquiry. This paper then explores characteristics of hermeneutic inquiry and its rich tradition, which may allow for a possible rendering of the meaning and value of the interdisciplinary relationship of nursing and poetry.

Prologue: *The Arrival of the Interdisciplinary Instance*

There are different kinds of conversations. In October 1999, I found myself in the kind of conversation that you have in the face of politeness and formality, the kind of conversation you have with new people, in the midst of a new venture. This particular venture was a graduate course in interpretive inquiry within the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary. The class was filled with intellectual arousal, debates, and discussions about "what is interpretive work" and what kinds of knowledge are generated from interpretive work; perhaps the very the kinds of conversation you would expect in a graduate class.

Then there are the conversations you have during the "break." That small space in time in which you leave the class to fetch a coffee, muffin, or a juice, something to replenish, to appease lingering appetites. The walk to the Education cafeteria is an important one. It is the path in which people fall in place beside one another, haphazardly; people seem to come together in an interest to know someone differently than how they know each other in class. It always "seemed" by chance with whom you would end up walking and continuing a different kind of conversation than that which was started in class.

As I walked, it was a woman named Lori from the class that I kept pace with. We entered into a conversation through an exchange of niceties, of delicate questions of "so what do you do?" and "what are your research interests?" I learned that she was a first year Doctoral student in the Faculty of Nursing. I then took my turn in the conversation and tentatively shared that I was a first-year Doctoral student in Educational Research, and for my Master's work I had studied the poetry of Canadian writer, Bronwen Wallace. I was tentative because in my academic travels thus far, no one was aware of who Wallace was. Within our exchange of words, something erupted and interrupted the quiet formality of our talk; this

something began with the name of Bronwen Wallace. There was a silence that yielded the tips of Hermes' wings. With Hermes arrival and delivery of the message, the interpretation began. The silence transformed into a familiar and fervent conversation as Lori eagerly talked about how she is bemused by the effect of Wallace's writing and poetry on people studying and working in the field of human care. Lori emphasized that something mysteriously "rings true" about Wallace's work.

Lori explained how she had recently facilitated a seminar for Clinical Nurse Specialists, and she was bewildered by the wonder of what occurred in her seminar. She used part of a short story by Wallace, as each person attending the seminar read a piece of the story aloud. In reading and experiencing the story, she claimed something happened, something was opened. Lori was surprised as she witnessed some people weeping out loud. Her surprise was made possible because she had known these people for many years, and had never seen them cry. She pointed out that she did not do much with the excerpts she used, as she added, "I did not need to." The story stood within itself and the seminar participants were evoked so much by the story that they began sharing stories of their own personal and particular experiences within nursing that resonated, for them, as a true experience. Wallace's story evoked other stories and opened a space for learning and meaning that Lori had never witnessed before. A professor from the Faculty of Nursing was also present as she was there to grade and to "mark" the seminar. Yet, ironically, what happened is the professor herself was *marked* in a lasting way (Gadamer 1989). From the stirring experience with Wallace's writing, she then carried Wallace's work into her nursing classes and has since used the story with her students as a way to generate unique openings that she too describes as a "mystery." The interdisciplinary instance of falling into conversation with Lori has since weaved into more stories from more teachers and students in nursing of how they too experience Wallace's work deeply and resonantly, and that her work has had a profound and almost inexplicable affect.

Hermes was now in full body; not just the wings were visible, but a hermeneutic claim had happened. Granted, it seems Hermes soon flew away, being the trickster and the allure that he is. The "messenger-god Hermes" arrived with the message, and my work now was to interpret the meaning of this message (Palmer 1969, 13). His visit became an invitation to begin to understand the generative kinship of nursing and poetry.

Becoming Part of the Story: Entering the Dialogue of Nursing and Poetry

A story of yours got this one going,
So I'm sending it back now, changed of course,
Just as each person I love
Is a relocation, where I take up
A different place in the world

(Wallace 1987, 80)

One of the most resonate phrases I have ever experienced by Bronwen Wallace happened six years ago when I encountered that "limitation and possibility mean about the same thing." This phrase was coined by Flannery O'Connor and has since taken its shape in different ways. One of these ways is that for Wallace, it became a "credo for living" because it "says something about paying attention to our limitations, learning to see them not as restrictions which we must strive to transcend, but as guides to the possibility of what we are" (Wallace 1992, 84). Before engaging in the *interpretation* of the kinship of poetry and nursing, I realized that it was important to first understand how epistemology and ontology fit within the kinship. I began

to see that like limitations and possibilities, these two positions of knowing and being may "mean about the same thing." I realized that these historically polarized positions might possibly be breathing together in order to create new life, a new way of knowing ourselves and the world.

An invitation then is extended to fall into this matrix-like textual conversation of how these positions, breathing together, give life to the possibility of understanding the meaning of nursing students and teachers experiencing Wallace's poetry (Gadamer 1989). Falling requires an ability to be in uncertainty, something Keats offered as the shaping quality of great writers, and I would add of readers and researchers. Negative capability is when one "is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats 1967, 1209). A century later, the conversation continues with Wallace (1992) and Bogden (1990), as they add that negative capability allows for engagement with aspects of knowing and being that might otherwise never be possible.

Philosophical Hermeneutics: A Habitat for Nursing and Poetry

Hans-Georg Gadamer revived hermeneutics in the human sciences and led the creation of philosophical hermeneutics with his pivotal work, *Truth and Method*. He clearly submits that this approach is not intended to "elaborate a system of rules to describe, let alone direct the methodological procedure of the human sciences" (Gadamer 1989, xxviii). Hermeneutics is "[t]he art of reaching an understanding — of something or with someone" (2001, 79). It invites a way of doing research that unfolds the "objectives of knowledge" (1989, xxix) as a condition that *enables* understanding, while maintaining a goal to understand differently (1989; Hoy 1978; Koch 1996). Thus, by delving into an understanding of the meaning of nursing students and teachers experiencing Wallace's poetry, there is a hoped-for consequence of a way of knowing ourselves differently, a kind of knowing that may arise from tenacious attention to the fabric of "dwelling" (Heidegger 1971, 213) in an experience of Wallace's poetry.

"Into the Midst of It": Re-mapping Epistemology

You'll take a map, of course, and keep it
Open in front of you on the dashboard,
Though it won't help. Oh, it'll give mileages,
Boundary lines, names, that sort of thing,
But there are places yet
Where names are powerless
And what you are entering
Is like the silence words get lost in
After they've been spoken.

(Wallace 1985, 20)

Epistemology is the study of how we know what we know, and ontology is the study of being. In order to offer how epistemology may play out in the experiencing of Wallace's poetry, a looking back is needed to revisit the tradition of this concept by opening a dialogue with *its* history. Understanding the scientific and traditional roots of epistemology yields the possibility of how the role of epistemology is different in a hermeneutic understanding of nursing and poetry. Hermeneutics has been described as a way of displacing epistemology (Madison 1988). I offer that a *re-placing* of a *re-conceived* notion of epistemology in hermeneutics is integral to understanding the importance of Wallace's poetry being read and discussed by nursing students and teachers.

Epistemology: Past and Present

Epistemology has traditionally been seen as "most legitimate the farther it is distanced from Being" (Miller 1993, 7). The separation of ontology and epistemology can be traced back to Greek philosophers who distinguished and assumed that being can be separated from our knowing. The presumption of separating knowledge from being is that a researcher is then able to be neutral and objective (Thayer-Bacon 1996).

Hermeneutic inquiry absolves the distance and scientific dissociation of subject and object, subsequently absolving the traditional disconnected nature of epistemology and ontology. In response to the colonization of epistemology (Flyvbjerg 2001) by the natural sciences, hermeneutics turned to ontology, thereby ironically distancing itself from epistemology. (Altenbernd Johnson 2000; Bauman 1992; Coltman 1998; Gadamer 1976; Gadamer 1989; Gallagher 1992; Grondin 1991; Jardine 1998; Madison 1988; Palmer 1969). In the writings about hermeneutic research, the connection between epistemology and ontology is seemingly absent. However, I offer that the recognition of the connection is needed to sustain interdisciplinary work. These two positions are necessarily interdependent and interconnected; their existence is dependent on each other. Such attention to, and sustenance of, the connected relationship between ontology and epistemology, and other historical dichotomies, is an honouring of the integrity of difference (Babbitt 2001).

Learning to Live With It: Re-conceiving Epistemology

this gentleness we learn
from what we can't heal.

(Wallace 1985, 77)

Epistemology, as it is used here, is a re-conceived position that emphasizes a bringing together of knowing and being. It is a conception that draws on the meaning *concile,* in its etymological sense of uniting, thus proposed as a uniting of the dichotomy of epistemology and ontology (Hoad 1996). Much of hermeneutics is grounded on the premise of rehabilitation, a going back and recovering the meaning of concepts such as art, history, and prejudice (Altenbernd Johnson 2000; Gadamer 1989). Such rehabilitations are needed to see the formative roles of Wallace's poetry in nursing — that it can "expand our own particular understanding" and in the process of expansion that "we also come upon a knowledge of ourselves that could be gained in no other way" (Nussbaum 1990, 252). The experience of poetry is to be taken as a "lived dimension" (Altenbernd Johnson 2000, 20). Although rehabilitation is prevalent in hermeneutics, my working out of epistemology is really a looking back in order to look forward. This is an act of "re-visioning … of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction." It is an act of looking back to understand the assumptions we live in, and until "we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves" (Rich 1979, 35).

Thus, re-conceiving epistemology involves understanding its history as a clue to how we have been living (Rich 1979). Hermeneutics is founded on how understanding is possible, which is different from the historical theory of epistemology that argues for "criteria for warranting knowledge claims [that] can be found without having to consider the way human beings know" (Thayer-Bacon 1996, 2). Therefore, in order to understand how understanding is possible, it is required that my own fore-understandings be known, not as an obstacle but an enabler in a hermeneutic inquiry that explores the relationship of nursing and poetry (Gadamer 1989; Grondin 1991; Hoy 1978).

Research as a Tapestry of Knowing and Being

> *In the Torah, the Hebrew, 'to know', often used in a sexual context, is not about facts but about connections. Knowledge, not as accumulation but as a charge and discharge. A release of energy from one site to another. Instead of a hoard of certainties, bug-collected, to make me feel secure, I can give up taxonomy and invite myself to the dance; the patterns, rhythms, multiplicity, paradoxes, shifts, currents, cross-currents, irregularities, irrationalities, geniuses, joints, pivots, worked out over time, and through time, to find the lines of thought that still transmit.*
>
> (Winterson 1998, 85)

"Every good poem begins in language awake to its own connections …" (Hirshfield 1997, 3). I agree, every good poem is alive and awake to its own connections, as with a hermeneutic inquiry there is an awareness of the inherent web-like connections of nursing students and teachers experiencing Wallace's poetry. Language, in the kinship of poetry and nursing, has become a living language that has an ontological nature. Experience *happens* in the medium of language; in language our being is illuminated and worlds come forth (Gadamer 1989; Palmer 1969). Poetry is a kind of language that is "something that is still spoken, aloud or in the mind, muttered in secret, subversive, reaching around corners, crumpled into a pocket, performed in a community, read aloud to the dying, recited by heart, scratched or sprayed on a wall. *That* kind of language (Rich 2001, 113-114).

This is taking poetry, as Heidegger argued, as something "otherwise than as literature" (Heidegger 1971, 214). Wallace's poetry is something that appears as a fierce charge of living, something that appears in everyday conversations with people who have connections among each other that are known and yet to be known. Not only is Wallace's poetry being spoken about, it also speaks and has something to say. Being prepared to hear what it says and what will be said about it are some of the ways we learn to listen to what may come to meet us or speak to us (Gadamer 1986; 1989). Wallace's poetry continues to appear in more conversations and bears witness to the hermeneutic notion of poetry as "never-to-be completed" (1986, 139), as it lives on in conversations that are continuously opened through her work being read and discussed in nursing classes.

The etymological meaning of understanding is to "grasp or know the meaning and to recognize as present" (Hoad 1996, 514). Knowing the meaning of the kinship of poetry and nursing then is not premised on a "factual knowing," but a kind of knowing that comes from self-awareness of being in the world. *Knowing* the meaning comes from my *being* a part of the cross-disciplinary conversations and not outside of it. It comes from Hermes bearing the message, and beginning the interpretation such that we learn something about ourselves in relation with others, for "understanding is ultimately self-understanding" (Gadamer 1989, 260).

"Always, Already": The Ontological Nature of Philosophical Hermeneutics

> *A poem enacts in words the presence of what we live among. It arises from the tough, delicate, heartbreaking rooting of what is in its own nonbeing. From that rooting, there arises elemental moments of being: of hunger, of play, of rage, of celebration, of dying. Such movements are always particular, speaking the things, which are. A poem enacts those living movements in words.*
>
> (Lee 1998, 24-25)

Poetry puts language in a state of emergence, in which life becomes manifest through its vivacity.

(Bachelard 1994, xxvii)

Hermeneutics emerged as a principle of biblical interpretation. The "earliest recorded occurrence of the word" was in 1654 (Palmer 1969, 34). Until the end of the nineteenth century, hermeneutics was a system of rules "governing the discipline of interpretation" (Grondin 1991, 1). This focus on method as a way of providing correct interpretation of texts was primarily epistemological in nature (Palmer 1969). "Philosophical hermeneutics, by comparison, is of a very recent date" (Grondin 1991, 2) and is concerned with the art of understanding (Altenbernd Johnson 2000; Gadamer 1989; Grondin 1991; Palmer 1969).

One of the major distinctions between traditional hermeneutics and the recent philosophical hermeneutics is the definitive turn from understanding as purely epistemic to understanding as ontological because "understanding always includes self-understanding — indeed, self-encounter" (Grondin 1991, 115). Ontology was borne out of Heidegger's critique of Husserl's conception of intentionality (Moran 2000). Husserl's development of phenomenology in the early 1900s emphasized the need to "turn toward the things themselves"(Abram 1996, 35), a shift that would recognize our "practical engagement with the world." Through Heidegger's critique of intentionality, he conceived the idea of Dasein, of being-in-the-world. Heidegger felt that "treating intentional acts as 'psychic acts' robs them of their connectedness with the person" (Moran 2000, 231). Thus, hermeneutics was introduced by Heidegger in the 1920s, proposing that it is *because* of our fore-understandings of the world, that we are *already* in the world, that understanding is even possible. We cannot bracket out our fore-understandings in order to know an experience (Gadamer 1989; Grondin 1991; Moran 2000; Palmer 1969; Palmer 1976).

Dwelling Together: Understanding and Experience

What you're looking for are the narrower,
unpaved roads that have become
the country they travel over, dreamlike
as the spare farms you catch
in the corner of your eye,
only to lose them
when you turn your head. The curves
that happen without warning
like a change of heart,
as if, after all these journeys,
the road were still feeling
its way through.

(Wallace 1985, 20)

All understanding within hermeneutic inquiry is self-understanding. Yet, it is important to recognize that the relationship of understanding and experience parallels that of epistemology and ontology. Understanding and experience define each other, and are inextricably connected in that understanding enables an experience to happen. The event of an experience transforms the understanding which then affects and makes possible more experiences. Being experienced means to be open to another experience, which is made possible by understanding, and experience (Gadamer 1989).

The definition of an experience in working out the poetry and nursing kinship speaks to the immediacy of an experience as "something becomes an 'experience' not only insofar as it is experienced, but insofar as its being experienced makes a special impression that gives it lasting importance. An 'experience' of this kind acquires a wholly new status when it is expressed in art" (Gadamer 1989, 61). Experience is always a part *of* something, and points toward the whole. Knowledge becomes knowledge because it is what we learn to live with, and it is in the unifying moments of the experience integrated into the whole of our lives that the experience becomes knowledge again, knowledge that we draw on when we enter into or prepare for future moments, encounters or even experiences. Gadamer wrote that "if something is called or considered an Erlebnis, that means it is rounded into the unity of a significant whole … [a]n experience is no longer just something that flows past quickly in the stream of conscious life; it is meant as a unity and thus attains a new mode of being one … [–] what can be called an experience constitutes itself in memory" (66).

When Heidegger (1971) writes about experience in relation to language and poetry, he describes it as something that comes to pass, to strike, and ultimately transforms our relation with language. I would further add that it transforms our relation with ourselves, such that it alters how experiences will come to meet us in the future, as "experience means eundo assequi, to obtain something along the way, to attain by going on a way" (66).

With the view that "to understand a work is to experience it" (Palmer 1969, 231), I anticipate discovering aspects or qualities that make an experiencing of Wallace's poetry what it is (van Manen 1990). This also means that the nursing students and teachers who have encountered Wallace's poetry experience a "liberation into the open" (Scheibler 2001, 156) that allows for ways of being and knowing that are uniquely important to how we are in the world. This also then calls for seeing Wallace's poetry as having "its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it" (Gadamer 1989, 102).

Effective-History/Historicity: A Principle of Hermeneutic Interpretation

> *Why does history matter? Why know it? … The present seems too deranged, too fragmented, too incoherent, unless you have a sense of the past … But about history, its contours are always changing, the way a landscape changes in snow or fog or sunlight, as new explorations uncover new truths — or untruths.*
>
> (Rich 2001, 142-143)

The principle of effective history is recognizing that we all exist within a history, that "we are conditioned by effective history" (Grondin 1991, 114). Recognition of and insight into the effect of history requires alacrity to language. Smith wrote that the first, and I would add, the fundamental requirement of hermeneutic inquiry is to "develop a deep attentiveness to language itself, to notice how one uses it and how others use it" (Smith 1994, 121). In tracing the etymology of certain words, meanings will point to a larger history (1994). Through an understanding of such histories, I am able to situate myself in this interdisciplinary mystery of poetry and nursing because I put into action my self-awareness that is contingent on my own past, and the history that I stand within: "Recognition of effective-history means that we must become aware of what Gadamer calls the hermeneutic situation. Humans are finite. We always stand within a situation. We cannot stand outside of the situation of our existence and see it from an objective distance where the whole of our existence can be illuminated. Rather, we 'light up' our situation from within that situation" (Altenbernd Johnson 2000, 32). In trying to understand the importance of nursing and poetry, it is essential then to understand my "location of self" in this process (Hertz 1997, viii). Further, my situatedness will continue to change and evolve because as new meanings emerge my self-understandings and consequently my horizon will change.

Horizon: A Principle of Hermeneutic Interpretation

Gadamer (1989) defined horizon as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (302). Thus, the horizon is temporal and changes as the situation or the vantage point of the person changes. Each nursing student and teacher who has had an experience of Wallace's poetry has his or her own horizon, as I come with mine. Thus, "[u]nderstanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (306). The fusion of horizons does not necessarily mean reaching agreement, but rather it is the meaning that gets created through the "coming together of different vantage points" (Koch 1996, 177). It is that point of convergence at which my understanding changes, and possibly those with whom I am in conversation with.

Working out how a fusion of horizons occurs is an act of interpretation that makes understanding explicit. Thus, in understanding why Wallace's poetry resounds with nursing students and teachers, I will need to understand the horizon in which they are situated. This can be brought forward with questions about the general experience of Wallace's poetry, or what has stood out for them, or how experiencing it has "illuminated" their being-in-the-world in a particular way and in a particular place: "When we try to understand another person's position on an issue, we say that we try to understand the standpoint or point of view of that person. We try to stand within that person's horizon. Historical consciousness takes this approach in order to understand something from the past. It does not claim to agree with the position that it takes. It takes the position in order to understand" (Altenbernd Johnson 2000, 33). What this means then, is that my horizon, which is connected to my self-understanding, will change as the meanings co-evolve with the nursing students and teachers.

Conversation/Dialogue: The Underlying Principle of Hermeneutic Interpretation

> *You play, you win, you play, you lose. You play. It's the playing that's irresistible … What you risk reveals what you value.*
>
> (Winterson 1987, 43)

Risk and *playing*: both words are vital to the possibility of understanding. Gadamer's (1989) analogy of conversation as play emphasizes the importance of participating and *being* fully present *in* conversation. Not *having* a conversation, but being *in* a conversation is an important distinction. Conversation, like game playing, is sustained by the buoyancy of the players/conversants who are absorbed within it (Linge 1976). "Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding" (Gadamer 1989, 385). Coming to an understanding about the subject matter takes place in language, through conversation, writing, and reading. Understanding and interpretation are synonymous in hermeneutic inquiry (1989). One of the inherent paradoxes of being a researcher in philosophical hermeneutics is that I am to be aware of the need to be absorbed in conversation, to be "theoria: which is true participation" (Linge 1976, 124) while also being aware of what is happening in the conversation. Thus, as a participant in the conversation, I am present at something and this kind of being present requires "being outside oneself … this kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness" (Gadamer 1989, 126). This is a hermeneutic requirement: to be led by the topic of the conversation, while at the same time being able to *fall* into the conversation.

Conversation in hermeneutics is premised on the possibility of a hermeneutic conversation or a genuine dialogue (Gadamer 1989). This means that the conversations between myself and students and teachers within nursing "involves equality and active reciprocity. It presupposes that both conversational partners are

concerned with a common subject matter — a common question — about which they converse, for dialogue is always about something." Thus, the understanding of the experience of experiencing Wallace's poetry means to not refer to its "past life," but rather its presence and active presentation in what is said in the poetry and through conversations (Linge 1976, xx). The active presence of the poetry is its "contemporaneity" (Gadamer 1989, 126). Gadamer (1989) purported that the contemporaneity belongs to the being of the work of the art, and that this is "not a mode of givenness in consciousness, but a task for consciousness and an achievement that is demanded of it" (127). Thus, the presence of Wallace's poetry in the experiences is not formed though our consciousness, but appears in a striking way to claim us, and it requires, or demands interpretation. This involves, then, participating in the "communication which the text makes to us" (Linge 1976, xx).

A hermeneutic conversation begins when I "genuinely" open myself to what is conveyed through the conversations with people about their experiences of Wallace's poetry. This means that I am prepared to share my meanings of the experiences and the poetry and to have them read back differently to me. What this entails is risk: I will risk my own understanding of such things as Wallace's poetry, literature, language, nursing, and experience, for the possibility of a different understanding. In risking my understanding for the possibility of understanding differently, I place value in transformation.

Breathing With the Topic: Keeping Conversation Alive

> *I'd better just acknowledge the question, and let it breathe.*
>
> (Lee 1998, 196)
>
> *I believe that poems are made of words and the breathing between them: That is the medium.*
>
> (Rich 2001, 113)

Keeping the question open and alive throughout the research is critical to the richness and sustenance of the interpretation. "Questions always bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing" (Gadamer 1989, 375). Questioning is inherent in hermeneutic inquiry, and the "essence of the question is to open up possibilities and keep them open" (299). I will keep open what experiencing Wallace's poetry may mean and its implications for understanding, nursing, and poetry, and other implications discovered in the process of the research. The dialectic process of question and answer is not to validate answers I may want to verify, or to have suspicions confirmed; rather the questioning "involves a laying open and holding open of possibilities" (Linge 1976, xxi). "When Gadamer talks about dialectic, however, it is talking about conversation, dialogue; for Gadamer, all genuine dialogue is inherently dialectical and, as such, takes on the structure of a game" (Coltman 1998, 52). It is essential, then, to keep open the orienting question of trying to understand the meaning of Wallace's poetry in nursing, for it is the dialectical structure, the process of "give and take" that is important for meaningful conversation (54).

To let the question breathe means to nurture it with other questions by breathing in conversation and in the reading of the poetry. The etymology of breathe is to inspire, to breathe something in: thus, the life of the question sustains the inspired possibilities of understanding an experience of Wallace's poetry in a particular way (Hirshfield 1997; Hoad 1996). Hermeneutic inquiry does not focus on what actually happens, but the possibility of understanding an experience in a particular way. To see possibility is to employ the imagination (Bogden 1990; Frye 1963) which contrasts seeing through the means of "methodological sterility" (Linge 1976, xxii). Imagination also plays an important role in being able to understand ourselves

and others *differently*. Kerney (1999) suggested that the "paradigm for the hermeneutic imagination is the poetic text that invites us to enter into its otherness and recognize ourselves in it, putting ourselves into question, losing ourselves in order to find ourselves" (xvi).

Language, and subsequently conversation, sustains an ontological character in this research study because it is the medium of human experience (Altenbernd Johnson 2000; Gadamer 1976; Grondin 1991; Palmer 1969). Without conversation, it would not be possible within the context of this study to interpret and to create meanings. In reflecting on the first conversation I had in which I discovered Wallace in nursing, were it not for the conversation, perhaps the kinship would not have come forth. But, it came forth *in* conversation as I talked with a fellow student about the magic of Wallace's poetry and how it resonated with people.

Keeping alive the conversation means dwelling within the possibility of deeper understandings coming forth. A "conversational weave" (Bennett 1991, 71) is sustained as all the conversations that have already taken place and are yet to begin will be threaded together, much like the webbed experience of hermeneutics being a final tapestry "in which every thread is guided by an unspeakably tender hand, placed beside another thread, and held and carried by a hundred others" (Rilke 1992, 23). Attention to the fabric of hermeneutic inquiry is an act of threading, for it is not an attempt to search for themes or commonalties; instead it is an "attempt to bring forth general impressions, specific and recurring ideas, and perturbing and distinctive resonances, familiarities, and echoes" (Moules 2000, 46).

"Getting the Words for It": Blueprints for a Poetic Pedagogy

> *The relationship between the interpretation of poetry and the acquisition of knowledge in ancient Greek sources shows that the educational value of poetry did not hinge on learning to author it, but on learning to take wisdom from it.*
>
> (Gallagher 1992, 1)

> *I decided to call my talk "Blueprints for a Larger Life" because it seems to me that the idea of a blueprint involves both the ability to express imaginatively, in the language of architecture, what we want to create, and at the same time recognizes that the blueprint must pay attention to such physical realities as gravity, weather, and the nature of concrete or wood. Otherwise, the building, like the poem, collapses.*
>
> (Wallace 1992, 215)

Poetic and *pedagogy* are two words I have placed together with the intention to recognize and build on the recursive and interdisciplinary relationship of experience and knowing. The appearance of Wallace's poetry within nursing, as students and teachers read her work in and out of class, conceives poetry as a *living* language; that poetry has its place in life, it can live in between and in the midst of conversation. Its life in books, on shelves, in classrooms, and as an object of theory has its place too. But here, it inhabits and becomes an interdisciplinary being, it crosses disciplines, slips away from theory, and finds itself in conversation with people primarily in the field of nursing. Wallace's poetry found its way into nursing classes in which there may be a need to understand how the particulars of care or nursing fit into the whole of practice. Gregory and Holmes (1998) claim that "poetry is a powerful way in which nurses regain, restore and remain intimate with their experiences, feelings and images" (1193). The experience of poetry becomes a "a way of seeing and knowing the core of nursing practice" (Gregory 1998, 1193-1194).

Poetry can be a porthole into our own world, subsequently shaping and affecting how we go in the world (Gadamer 1986; Smith 1994). Ventura (2000) wrote that the central aspect of an experience with poetry is the "spiritual geography: that at any moment you can step out of the state you're in into something more intense, even exalted." This place is an experience of poetry in which we learn to be "on the lookout for the extraordinary in the so-called normal — a healing knowledge" (43). This idea of a healing knowledge is akin to a kind of moral knowledge that we have when we attempt to know something and do not stand over against a situation, but that we recognize that we affect and are affected by the situation (Gadamer 1989; Gallagher 1992). Such knowledges are some of the hoped-for consequences of my research study. Poetry can be understood as a "kind of action … placing itself in a dialogue with others out beyond the individual self" (Rich 1986, 181). Poetry spurs relationships, stokes connections among people and thought, and brings to light that which we live among, and that which we can imagine. Poetry, as a living language, points to the grace of the particulars in which we resonate, as we "bear witness to those smaller choices/we all have to make," and to the common unanticipated rhythm of living *here* (Wallace 1987, 48).

It is the re-conceived understanding of epistemology and ontology that dwells within poetic pedagogy. Knowledge is something that people weave together, particularly in conversation, such that the boundaries and distinction between "knowers" and "knowledge" are no longer distinguishable, just as Hermes is capable of moving between worlds and crossing boundaries and thresholds with ease (Thayer-Bacon 1996; Palmer 1999). This has been described as the familial, such as the ways in which people and Wallace's poetry are interconnected. The interconnections are kept alive in conversation, elevating the ways in which words are woven and intertwined in conversation, reflection and writing, through breathing in the questions and breathing out the recognition of dwelling in the "kinships, relations, and similarities it evokes" (Jardine 1998, 27).

Poetry brings connections to life, allows uncertainties to sometimes be a guide, enables us to swim in "dark waters" (Babbitt 2001, 23). Poetry's work becomes a kind of "clarification and magnification of being." In understanding what experiencing Wallace's poetry means, there is a giving over to "a different mode of knowing: to poetry's knowing, and to the increase of existence it brings, unlike any other" (Hirshfield 1997, vii). Knowledge is that which we come to live with as it dissolves into who we are, to then come forward again as an experience that will enable other understandings.

Epilogue: "The last word between us"

The kind of knowledge generated through the dwelling of Wallace's poetry in nursing is a kind of knowledge that comes from an awareness and attunement of what it means to *be in the world*. Thus, an important implication of uncovering the meaning of Wallace's poetry and nursing is to open up alternative "ways of seeing … to recognize what we have never seen before" (Dorscht 1991, 104); we open alternative ways of seeing ourselves that will shape how we respond and act in our lives. Education is concerned with a "bringing forth of human life"; poetry brings forward life by reminding us of what we live among (Lee 1998, 24). In this way, a hermeneutic inquiry into understanding the meaning of experiencing Wallace's poetry is educational.

Experiencing poetry opens a landscape in which we can encounter ourselves, and step out of the landscape differently than when we moved into it. Such a landscape is fertile for the generative possibility of understanding: "For of all things that confront us in nature and history, it is the work of art that speaks to us most directly. It possesses a mysterious intimacy that grips our entire being, as if there were no distance at all and every encounter with it were an encounter with ourselves" (Gadamer 1976, 95).

Hence, "the last word between us" is really a return to some of the first words of this paper, a return to the word *map* and the image and endeavour of *re-mapping*. The hermeneutic map for such understanding is written as we live, walk, and move through the landscape. It is a kind of mapping that maps itself by being in the world. To enter such a venture with an unmarked map requires a confidence in what will be opened

and found. It also requires a faith in the *process* of experience and understanding, to believe that the process is as equally important as what will finally be found and offered back to the world for more conversation:

Remember that day you taught me
how to look for four-leaf clovers?
"Don't try so hard," you kept saying,
"just peek from the corner of your eye,
like this, "running your fingers
through a patch and coming up with one
every time, surprised as I was
and with no more faith, but opening
your hand out anyway, that gesture
which belongs to any gamble,
no matter how crazy, the movement
by which a life gets changed
for keeps, a reach
for what we only hope
is there.

(Wallace 1987, 55)

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